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THOUGHTS ON PARLIAMENTARY REFORM

by

John Stuart Mill

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BY

JOHN STUART MILL.



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NEARLY the whole of this pamphlet, including the argument on the Ballot, was written five years ago, in anticipation of the Reform Bill of Lord Aberdeen's Government. The causes which at that period kept back the question itself, prevented the publication of these remarks upon it. Subsequent reflection has only strengthened the opinions then expressed. They are now published, because it is at the present time, if ever, that their publication can have any chance of being useful.

THOUGHTS

ON

PARLIAMENTARY REFORM.

AT the interval of about a generation from the passing of the first Reform Act, by a sort of universal consent the Legislature is about to employ itself in enacting a second. This determination has been adopted in circumstances strikingly contrasted with those by which it is usual for constitutional changes to be ushered in, and, at least immediately, brought about. The change to which all are looking forward, has not been pressed upon the ruling powers by impetuous and formidable demonstrations of public sentiment, nor preceded by signs of widespread discontent with the working of the existing political institutions. It was thought a great thing that the Reform Bill of 1832 could be passed without an armed insurrection: to all appearance, that of 1859 will become law without having required, or occasioned, any unusual amount even of peaceful agitation. And this is the more noticeable, because there has been, at various times since 1832, much greater dissatisfaction than at present with public affairs; a much stronger sense of practical grievances, combined with a far greater amount of physical

present to be looked for. It is not what is promised; and the state of opinion, and of European politics, is not favourable to its being carried. It is, however, indispensable that the Reform should not be merely nominal; that it should be a real change, a substantial improvement, which may be accepted as a step by those whom it will by no means permanently satisfy, and may hold out sufficient promise of good to be really valued. The point for consideration, therefore, is, what are the qualities most valuable in a half-measure: for with less than these, no Reformer ought to be even temporarily satisfied. Now, in a good half-measure of Reform, there are at least two essential requisites. In the first place, it should be aimed at the really worst features of the existing system. Since it does not profess to do everything, it should do what is most required: it should apply a corrective where one is the most urgently needed. Secondly, it should be conceived with an eye to the further changes which may be expected hereafter. This does not mean that it should necessarily be framed with a view to accelerate further changes, but rather to guide and regulate them when they arrive. A legislator is bound not to think solely of the present effects of his measures; he must consider what influence the acts he does now, may have over those of his successors. Whatever change he introduces, should be a step in the direction in which a further advance is, or will hereafter be, desirable. His half-measure should be so constructed as to recognise and embody the principles which, if no hindrance existed, would form the best foundation of a complete measure.

The first condition, that of breaking in upon the existing system at its worst point, will be in a considerable degree fulfilled by any measure which clears away the small constituencies.

The most peccant element in the present state of the representation is not the small number of the electors, taken in the aggregate. They are too few, doubtless, and they will always be too few while any are excluded whose admission would not deteriorate the quality of the mass. At present, too, admission and exclusion are capricious; the same description of persons are admitted in cities and parliamentary boroughs, who are excluded in all other towns and in the rural districts. Whatever qualification, or variety of qualifications, may be fixed upon, it is reasonable that they should be the same in one place as in another. But these are not the crying evils. They might be removed without making any very material difference, either in the composition of the House of Commons, or in the inducements acting on its members. The most serious mischief is, not that only a fraction of the community have the right to vote, but that the majority of the House is returned by a very small fraction of that fraction. The small boroughs, those which number from 200 to 400 electors, are the seat of all the evils which the Reform Act of 1832 intended, and was believed, to annihilate. Many of them are still pocket boroughs; the members they return are almost as much the nominees of some great family in the neighbourhood, as were the members for Gatton and Old Sarum. The others are mostly the prize of the highest bidder. If recent legislation has rendered direct bribery a more hazardous

experiment than the candidates like to venture on, success belongs to him who expends most money in opening the public-houses, or in hiring agents, canvassers, printers, and committee-rooms. Local interests being divided, the worst portion of the electors, those who are corrupted by money or by drunkenness, turn the scale. Between the nomination boroughs and the corrupt boroughs, a large portion of the House are still what they were before 1832, either the delegates of individuals, or the representatives of their own purses. Wherever these petty constituencies are not under the thralldom of some one individual, every fresh contested election becomes more and more an affair of mere money. This is a growing mischief, even in the large constituencies; from the very small ones it is almost inseparable: nor is anything else to be expected from them, than that they should become demoralized more and more. The theory professed by anti-reformers is, that political rights should be reserved for property and intelligence. By upholding the small boroughs, they dedicate a large, and almost predominant portion of the representation to the needy, the dependent, and the uneducated.

✓ To correct this evil, without throwing down the barrier between the borough and the county constituencies, a change which, even if desirable, is not at present attainable, there is an obvious expedient; to unite the small towns into districts of boroughs; as is already the case in Wales and in Scotland. The "Parliamentary Representation Bill" introduced by Lord John Russell in 1852, adopted this expedient; but unfortunately in so perverted a shape, as to satisfy

nobody, and to create greater anomalies than it cured.

One of the declared principles of Lord John Russell's Bill was, that there should be no disfranchisement; and in this perhaps he may have been in the right; since few, if any, of the small boroughs are so absolutely insignificant as to require their entire exclusion from the representation. But Lord John Russell thought it necessary that every existing small borough should become the nucleus of a separate aggregation of townships. He eked out the constituencies by annexing insignificant places close by, instead of going a little farther off for considerable unrepresented towns; while in no case did he think it admissible to include two places which already returned members to Parliament, in one and the same district. Thus, to take the very first entry in the schedule, Berkshire possesses two small boroughs, only a few miles apart: Abingdon, with 312 electors; Wallingford, with 428. Instead of throwing these places and half a dozen others into one district, Lord John Russell looked out for two still smaller places at double the distance, and added Farringdon to one borough and Wantage to the other; making, instead of one good constituency, two bad ones, as bad as, or very little better than, the present. The next county, Buckinghamshire, contains two boroughs still nearer together, each returning two members, though the one (Marlow) has only 354, the other (Wycombe) but 346 electors. In forming a district it would be natural to throw these two into one; and one member is as much as even then their joint importance would entitle them to. Lord John Russell left to each of

the boroughs its two members, reinforcing them by four small places, every one more distant from the present boroughs than these are from one another:

While the representation of the small boroughs was thus patched up, a host of towns, dispersed all over the country, far exceeding them in population and importance, were left, as at present, unrepresented. The new places taken in to form a district never exceeded the smallest scantling which, it was supposed, would afford the minimum of a presentable constituency. Thus Reigate, at that time a nomination borough, requiring to be extended, the town of Dorking was added to it, and nothing more; while Croydon, Kingston, and Epsom, towns in the immediate neighbourhood, all of them with equal or greater claims to be represented, were put aside.

Had this schedule been adopted, it would have spotted the map of England with groups of small places so capriciously distributed as to bring the very idea of districts of boroughs into contempt, and without mitigating, but rather in some respects increasing, the present causes of complaint. The small constituencies would still have remained small, while, instead of being what they professed to be, they would have been more than ever rural constituencies, in subjection, under any ordinary circumstances, to the neighbouring landed proprietors. The villages of 1000, and towns of 2000 and 3000 inhabitants, which were taken to make up a number, would have been a clear addition to the agricultural influence in the House. It is just possible, though scarcely probable, that bribery might have been diminished; but the local influences would have gained whatever the direct

money-power lost, and the members for the districts would have been merely an inferior sort of county members.

Yet, if the principle of combining several boroughs was once admitted, what course could be more obvious than to take all the present boroughs, and all unrepresented towns of more than a certain amount of population (say, for example, 5000), and leaving out all those, whether existing as boroughs or still to be created, whose importance entitles them to one member, or more than one, of their own, to arrange the others in groups according to geographical convenience, care being taken to give to each group something like the same number of electors. No reason is apparent why this plan was not adopted, except the misplaced scruple against merging two existing boroughs into one. If what is now a borough, is to become one of a group, what difference can it make to the electors whether they are bound up with existing, or only with newly enfranchised co-electors? What could be more absurd than that Calne and Chippenham, both nomination boroughs, and actually conterminous, should (as in Lord John Russell's scheme) subsist as a sort of double star, with each its separate system of planets; or that Amesbury and Downton should be recalled from Schedule A to furnish a supplementary constituency to the little borough of Wilton, instead of adding it to the adjacent city of Salisbury? The proper aggregate number of members for small towns being first, after due consideration, determined, all places of such size as to be politically entitled to the designation of towns should be admitted to share in it. The greater the number of places included in

each district, the better prospect of a creditable choice. The local influences of families and corporations would then have more chance of neutralizing one another; and with the aid of stringent measures against all forms of corruption, there would be some prospect that the choice of representatives might occasionally be made on public rather than on private grounds.

Subsequently to Lord John Russell's abortive attempt, another Reform Bill, to which he was also a party, was brought into Parliament, by Lord Aberdeen's Government. In this second Bill, the principle of grouping boroughs, which had been introduced in so awkward a manner in the former Bill, was dropped altogether; and the older plan, a complete disfranchisement of some boroughs, and a reduction of others from two members to one, was reverted to; the representation, withdrawn from them, being transferred to single towns not at present represented, or added to the representation of those constituencies which were thought entitled to a greater number of members than they possess. Most of the private projects of Reform hitherto promulgated, proceed on the same idea, involving a large amount of disfranchisement. All such schemes are good and commendable, in so far as they get rid of the small and dependent constituencies; but they do so, as it seems to me, in a manner far more objectionable, than that of merging those small constituencies in districts of boroughs. For, in the first place, many electors would be entirely disfranchised who are as well entitled as other people to vote for representatives, though not to have representatives to themselves; and, in the next place, this

method falls greatly short of the other in extent of enfranchisement. For the improved repartition of the suffrage by grouping of boroughs provides also for a considerable extension. Even the ten-pound householders of all the unenfranchised towns with more than 5000 inhabitants, would be a large addition to the numerical amount of the constituency, obtained without lowering the qualification, or introducing any change which could alarm timidity in the conditions for the exercise of the suffrage.

If, indeed, every elector in the disfranchised boroughs, and every ten-pound householder in the unrepresented towns, obtains a vote for the county, by the adoption, in the new Reform Bill, of Mr. Locke King's proposal (already once affirmed by the House of Commons), the two objections just mentioned will cease to exist. But in that case those objections will give place to a still more fatal one; for such a measure would be little less than the complete political extinction of the rural districts. Except in the few places where there is still a yeomanry, as in Cumberland, Westmoreland, and in some degree North Yorkshire and Kent, there exists in the agricultural population no class but the farmers, intermediate between the landlords and the labourers. A ten-pound franchise will admit no agricultural labourer; and the farmers and landlords would collectively be far outnumbered by the ten-pound householders of all the small towns in England. To enable the agricultural population to hold its fair share of the representation under any uniform and extensive suffrage short of universal, it seems absolutely necessary that the town electors should, as a rule, be kept

out of the county constituencies. And the sole alternative is to form them, or the great bulk of them, into constituencies by themselves.

It has been stated as an objection to the formation of districts of boroughs, that elections would be rendered more expensive. The candidates, it has been said, would require as many committees as there are boroughs, and other things in proportion. The objection cannot weigh much with reference to the particular question, since every other mode of forming district constituencies would be liable to it in an equal, if not a greater degree. No elections are free from it, except those for single, and even for small, towns: for if the town is of any size, the candidates have almost always a plurality of committees for the different quarters or divisions. But the remark points to one of the most conspicuous vices of the existing electoral system; the only one which can dispute pre-eminence with the multitude of small constituencies; and one against which the new Reform Bill, if it is to deserve support, should contain some decided and effectual provision. In a good representative system there would be no election expenses, to be borne by the candidate. Their effect is wholly pernicious. Politically, they constitute a property qualification of the worst kind. The old property qualification, given up by everybody, and at length abolished, only required that a member of parliament should possess a fortune; this requires that he should have spent one. Morally, it is still worse; not only by the profligate and demoralizing character of much of the expenditure, but by the corrupting effect of the notion inculcated on the voter, that the person he votes for should pay a large sum

of money for permission to serve the public. Does any one expect his attorney to pay for liberty to conduct his lawsuit? or his physician to pay for leave to cure him of a disease? On the contrary, he pays them at a high price for undertaking his business. If the office of a member of Parliament were felt to be a public trust, which no one has a moral right to take upon himself for any purpose but that of fulfilling its duties, would it be endured for an instant that, in addition to performing those duties without salary, he should make a large payment besides for the privilege of performing them? Such a practice is the surest proof that to vote for a candidate is regarded either as help given him towards attaining private ends, or at least as a compliment to his vanity, for which he should be willing to pay an equivalent. They must be poor politicians who do not know the vast efficacy of such indirect moral influences; though there is hardly anything which, in this country, is so little considered by statesmen and public functionaries. The incidental circumstances which surround a public act, and betoken the expectation entertained by society in regard to it, irrevocably determine the moral sentiment which adheres to the act in the mind of an average individual. So long as the candidate himself, and the customs of the world, seem to regard the function of a member of Parliament less as a duty to be discharged, than as a personal favour to be solicited, no effort will avail to implant in an ordinary voter the feeling that the election of a member of Parliament is also a matter of duty, and that he is not at liberty to bestow his vote on any other consideration than that of per-

sonal fitness. The necessary expenses of an election, those which concern all the candidates equally, should, it has often been urged, be defrayed either by the municipal body or by the State. With regard to the sources of expense which are personal to the individual candidate, committees, canvassing, even printing and public meetings, it is in every way better that these things should not be done at all, unless done by the gratuitous zeal, or paid for by the contributions, of his supporters. Even now there are several members of Parliament whose elections cost them nothing, the whole expense being defrayed by their constituents. Of these members we may be completely assured that they are elected from public motives; that they are the men whom the voters really wish to see elected, in preference to all others, either on account of the principles they represent, or the services they are thought qualified to render. Every other member, even on the supposition of an honest choice, may, for aught it is possible to know, be elected, not as the best man, but as the best rich man, who can be had.

If it be asked, in what manner the object here pointed out is to be realized, I believe that there is one, and but one, means which would probably be effectual. No mere prohibitory law would accomplish the purpose, but it would probably be effected if every member of Parliament, previously to taking his seat, were required to make a declaration on honour that he had not paid, and a solemn engagement not to pay, money or money's worth, directly or indirectly, on account of his election. A declaration on honour is still not thought lightly of, by any who,

unless by a rare exception, are likely to be returned to Parliament. I am quite alive to the fact that the veracity even of an affirmation thus sanctioned could not be depended on if opinion ceased to enforce it; and that the declaration might, like political oaths, come to be considered a mere form. The great reluctance, however, invariably manifested to require such a disclaimer, even in the case of bribery, shows that it is considered likely to have some efficacy. And I believe that the laxity which prevails on the subject of many of the public declarations required by law, arises from their being exacted for purposes which the public do not, and in most cases ought not, to approve. Opinion tolerates a false disclaimer, only when it already tolerates the thing disclaimed. And I am not aware that the toleration extends to any case in which the obligation is further enforced, as it ought to be in this case, by the penalties of perjury. Let law and opinion conspire to the end that election expenses be suppressed, and a denial on honour will be considered binding.

It has already been remarked, that a Bill such as we may expect, a measure of compromise, which does not profess to make any alteration in fundamentals, but only to introduce such amendments as are consistent with the general outline of the existing arrangements; a Bill, therefore, which cannot satisfy the wishes of those who think the present system radically defective—ought to fulfil two conditions: it should remove or alleviate the most peccant parts of the existing system; and, as far as it goes, it should be a recognition and embodiment of the

principles which are fittest to preside over an entire renovation; so that it may not be an impediment to further improvement, but, on the contrary, a step towards the quarter in which, if anywhere, further improvement is to be looked for. The former of these topics having been considered, the latter, and more difficult, remains. In order to judge how this partial reform may be made conformable to the principles of a thorough reform, it is necessary to consider what these principles are: a subject which for a century past has been often enough discussed, but on which, as on all great subjects, there still remain many things to be said. We should endeavour to set before ourselves the ideal conception of a perfect representative government, however distant, not to say doubtful, may be the hope of actually obtaining it: to the intent that whatever is now done may if possible be in the direction of what is best, and may bring the actual fact nearer, and not further off from the standard of right, at however great a distance it may still remain from that standard. Though we may be only sailing from the port of London to that of Hull, let us still guide our navigation by the North Star.

(1) First, then, in every system of representation which can be conceived as perfect, every adult human being,*

* I pass over the question whether insane persons, or persons convicted of crime, should be exceptions to this general provision. As far as the direct influence of their votes went, it would scarcely be worth while to exclude them. But, as an aid to the great object of giving a moral character to the exercise of the suffrage, it might be expedient that in case of crimes evincing a high degree of insensibility to social obligation, the deprivation of this and other civic rights should form part of the sentence.

it appears to me, would have the means of exercising, through the electoral suffrage, a portion of influence on the management of public affairs. It may be said, that the largest, or a very large portion of the people, in this and other countries, are not fit for political influence; that they would make a bad use of it; that it is impossible to foresee a time when they could safely be trusted with it. I am not prepared to contest all this; but I cannot look upon the necessity of withholding this function from any portion of the community otherwise than as a very great evil; against which it is the bounden duty of governments, of teachers, and of individuals, each in his sphere, to struggle, and never to be contented unless they are making sensible progress towards getting rid of it. (It is important that every one of the governed should have a voice in the government, because it can hardly be expected that those who have no voice will not be unjustly postponed to those who have. It is still more important as one of the means of national education. A person who is excluded from all participation in political business is not a citizen. He has not the feelings of a citizen. To take an active interest in politics is, in modern times, the first thing which elevates the mind to large interests and contemplations; the first step out of the narrow bounds of individual and family selfishness, the first opening in the contracted round of daily occupations.) The person who in any free country takes no interest in politics, unless from having been taught that he ought not to do so, must be too ill-informed, too stupid, or too selfish, to be interested in them; and we may rely on it that he cares as little for anything else, which

does not directly concern himself or his personal connexions. Whoever is capable of feeling any common interest with his kind, or with his country, or with his city, is interested in politics; and to be interested in them, and not wish for a voice in them, is an impossibility. The possession and the exercise of political, and among others of electoral, rights, is one of the chief instruments both of moral and of intellectual training for the popular mind; and all governments must be regarded as extremely imperfect, until every one who is required to obey the laws, has a voice, or the prospect of a voice, in their enactment and administration.

2. But ought every one to have an equal voice? This is a totally different proposition; and in my judgment as palpably false, as the other is true and important. Here it is that I part company, on the question of principle, with the democratic reformers. Agreeing with them in looking forward to universal suffrage as an ultimate aim, I altogether dissent from their advocacy of electoral districts, understood as a means of giving equal weight to the vote of every individual. They say, that every one has an equal interest in being well governed, and that every one, therefore, has an equal claim to control over his own government. I might agree to this, if control over his own government were really the thing in question; but what I am asked to assent to is, that every individual has an equal claim to control over the government of other people. The power which the suffrage gives is not over himself alone; it is power over others also: whatever control the voter is enabled to exercise over his own concerns, he exercises the same degree of it

over those of every one else. Now, it can in no sort be admitted that all persons have an equal claim to power over others. The claims of different people to such power differ as much, as their qualifications for exercising it beneficially. ✓

If it is asserted that all persons ought to be equal in every description of right recognised by society, I answer, not until all are equal in worth as human beings. It is the fact, that one person is *not* as good as another; and it is reversing all the rules of rational conduct, to attempt to raise a political fabric on a supposition which is at variance with fact. (Putting aside for the present the consideration of moral worth, of which, though more important even than intellectual, it is not so easy to find an available test; a person who cannot read, is not as good, for the purposes of human life, as one who can.) A person who can read, but cannot write or calculate, is not as good as a person who can do both. A person who can read, write, and calculate, but who knows nothing of the properties of natural objects, or of other places and countries, or of the human beings who have lived before him, or of the ideas, opinions, and practices of his fellow-creatures generally, is not so good as a person who knows these things. A person who has not, either by reading or conversation, made himself acquainted with the wisest thoughts of the wisest men, and with the great examples of a beneficent and virtuous life, is not so good as one who is familiar with these. A person who has even filled himself with this various knowledge, but has not digested it—who could give no clear and coherent account of it, and has never exercised his own mind,

or derived an original thought from his own observation, experience, or reasoning, is not so good, for any human purpose, as one who has. There is no one who, in any matter which concerns himself, would not rather have his affairs managed by a person of greater knowledge and intelligence, than by one of less. There is no one who, if he was obliged to confide his interest jointly to both, would not desire to give a more potential voice to the more educated and more cultivated of the two.

(N73.) This is no justification for making the less educated the slave, or serf, or mere dependent of the other. The subjection of any one individual or class to another, is always and necessarily disastrous in its effects on both. That power should be exercised over any portion of mankind without any obligation of consulting them, is only tolerable while they are in an infantine, or a semi-barbarous state. In any civilized condition, power ought never to be exempt from the necessity of appealing to the reason, and recommending itself by motives which justify it to the conscience and feelings, of the governed. In the present state of society, and under representative institutions, there is no mode of imposing this necessity on the ruling classes, as towards all other persons in the community, except by giving to every one a vote. [But there is a wide interval between refusing votes to the great majority, and acknowledging in each individual among them a right to have his vote counted for exactly as much as the vote of the most highly educated person in the community; with the further addition that, under the name of equality, it would in reality count for vastly more, as long as the uneducated so

greatly outnumber the educated. There is no such thing in morals as a *right* to power over others; and the electoral suffrage is that power. When all have votes, it will be both just in principle and necessary in fact, that some mode be adopted of giving greater weight to the suffrage of the more educated voter; some means by which the more intrinsically valuable member of society, the one who is more capable, more competent for the general affairs of life, and possesses more of the knowledge applicable to the management of the affairs of the community, should, as far as practicable, be singled out, and allowed a superiority of influence proportioned to his higher qualifications. 173

The most direct mode of effecting this, would be to establish plurality of votes, in favour of those who could afford a reasonable presumption of superior knowledge and cultivation. If every ordinary unskilled labourer had one vote, a skilled labourer, whose occupation requires an exercised mind and a knowledge of some of the laws of external nature, ought to have two. A foreman, or superintendent of labour, whose occupation requires something more of general culture, and some moral as well as intellectual qualities, should perhaps have three. A farmer, manufacturer, or trader, who requires a still larger range of ideas and knowledge, and the power of guiding and attending to a great number of various operations at once, should have three or four. A member of any profession requiring a long, accurate, and systematic mental cultivation,—a lawyer, a physician or surgeon, a clergyman of any denomination, a literary man, an artist, a public functionary (or, at

all events, a member of every intellectual profession at the threshold of which there is a satisfactory examination test) ought to have five or six. A graduate of any university, or a person freely elected a member of any learned society, is entitled to at least as many. A certificate of having passed through a complete course of instruction at any place of education publicly recognised as one where the higher branches of knowledge are taught, should confer a plurality of votes; and there ought to be an organization of voluntary examinations throughout the country (agreeably to the precedent set by the middle-class examinations so wisely and virtuously instituted by the University of Oxford) at which any person whatever might present himself, and obtain, from impartial examiners, a certificate of his possessing the acquirements which would entitle him to any number of votes, up to the largest allowed to one individual. The presumption of superior instruction derived from mere pecuniary qualification is, in the system of arrangements we are now considering, inadmissible. It is a presumption which often fails, and to those against whom it operates, it is always invidious. What it is important to ascertain is education; and education can be tested directly, or by much stronger presumptive evidence than is afforded by income, or payment of taxes, or the quality of the house which a person inhabits.

(The perfection, then, of an electoral system would be, that every person should have one vote, but that every well-educated person in the community should have more than one, on a scale corresponding as far as practicable to their amount of education. And neither

of these constituents of a perfect representative system is admissible without the other.) While the suffrage is confined altogether to a limited class, that class has no occasion for plural voting; which would probably, in those circumstances, only create an oligarchy within an oligarchy. (On the other hand, if the most numerous class, which (saving honourable exceptions on one side, or disgraceful ones on the other) is the lowest in the educational scale, refuses to recognise a right in the better educated, in virtue of their superior qualifications, to such plurality of votes as may prevent them from being always and hopelessly outvoted by the comparatively incapable, the numerical majority must submit to have the suffrage limited to such portion of their numbers, or to have such a distribution made of the constituencies, as may effect the necessary balance between numbers and education in another manner.*)

* One mode of effecting this has been urged, with considerable emphasis, in a memorial addressed to Lord Palmerston, and bearing the signatures of many persons distinguished in literature and science. It consists in giving to certain classes and professions, considered as of an intellectual character, a representation apart; the persons composing them throughout the country being registered as a separate constituency, and having a large number of representatives separately allotted to them, to be elected by them in local divisions. The object aimed at by this scheme is the same which I have in view; but, with sincere deference to some of those whose names are appended to it, I cannot think that they have chosen an eligible mode of encountering the difficulty. Nothing could be invented more calculated to make the privilege assigned to education, and the educated class itself, unpopular, and to create a permanent opposition and rivalry between the representatives of the educated and those of the presumed uneducated. Neither should I expect that the specially and professionally educated classes would be by any

Since the time is not come for obtaining, or even asking for, a representative system founded on the preceding principles, the point for practical consideration is, what measure it is possible to adopt now, which may in any degree conform to and recognise these principles, and facilitate instead of impeding a further application of them when circumstances may require or admit of it.

One means for this purpose very obviously presents itself. It is universally agreed that the expected measure, whatever else it may contain, shall include a considerable extension of the suffrage: the desirable object will be realized if this extension be made subordinate to an Educational Qualification. Even in the most democratic system of representative govern-

means so certain to return good representatives of their own, as they would be to form a valuable element in a miscellaneous constituency. It is a melancholy truth, but it is one which the experience of all academies and learned or scientific bodies establishes, that the suffrages of a select class of intellectual men are rarely given to the most really intellectual of their own number. Not the men of genius who are in advance of the body, and who compel it to advance, but the well-tutored and inoffensive mediocrities who best represent its average composition, are those whom it delights to honour. The man of real eminence, on the contrary, is the candidate whom it could with most effect present to a mixed constituency. In this as in every other case, it is not separating classes of persons and organizing them apart, but fusing them with other classes very different from themselves, which eliminates class interests and class feelings. One who desires to be a legislator should rest on recommendations not addressing themselves to a class, but to feelings and interests common to all classes: the simple as well as the learned should feel him to be their representative; otherwise his words and thoughts will do worse than even fall dead on their minds; will be apt to rouse in them a sentiment of opposition.

ment, some sort of educational qualification is required by principle. (We must never lose sight of the truth, that the suffrage for a member of Parliament is power over others, and that to power over others no *right* can possibly exist.) Whoever wishes to exercise it, is bound to acquire the necessary qualifications, as far as their acquisition is practicable to him. I have expressed my conviction that in the best possible system of representation, every person without exception would have a vote; but this does not imply that any one should have it unconditionally; only that the conditions should be such as all could fulfil. The greatest amount of education which can be fairly regarded as within the reach of every one, should be exacted as a peremptory condition from all claimants of the franchise.

Society is at present as backward in providing education, as in recognising its claims; and the general standard of instruction in England is so low, that if anything more than the merest elements were required, the number of voters would be even smaller than at present. But reading, writing, and the simple rules of arithmetic, can now be acquired, it may be fairly said, by any person who desires them; and there is surely no reason why every one who applies to be registered as an elector, should not be required to copy a sentence of English in the presence of the registering officer, and to perform a common sum in the rule of three. The principle of an educational qualification being thus established, more might hereafter be required when more had been given; but household, or even universal suffrage, with this small amount of educational require-

ment, would probably be safer than a much more restricted suffrage without it. Reading, writing, and arithmetic are but a low standard of educational qualification; yet even this would probably have sufficed to save France from her present degradation. The millions of voters who, in opposition to nearly every educated person in the country, made Louis Napoleon President, were chiefly peasants who could neither read nor write, and whose knowledge of public men, even by name, was limited to oral tradition.

If there ever was a political principle at once liberal and conservative, it is that of an educational qualification. None are so illiberal, none so bigoted in their hostility to improvement, none so superstitiously attached to the stupidest and worst of old forms and usages, as the uneducated. None are so unscrupulous, none so eager to clutch at whatever they have not and others have, as the uneducated in possession of power. An uneducated mind is almost incapable of clearly conceiving the rights of others. There is a great abatement in the dread which people of property once entertained of universal suffrage. Recent example has shown that, if it subverts a constitution, it is as likely to do so in favour of despotism as of democracy. But, whatever be the most probable complexion of the evil to be feared, no lover of improvement can desire that the *predominant* power should be turned over to persons in the mental and moral condition of the English working classes; and no Conservative needs object to making the franchise accessible to those classes at the price of a moderate degree of useful and honourable exertion. To make a participation in political rights the reward of

mental improvement, would have many inestimable effects besides the obvious one. It would do more than merely admit the best and exclude the worst of the working classes; it would do more than make an honourable distinction in favour of the educated, and create an additional motive for seeking education. It would cause the electoral suffrage to be in time regarded in a totally different light. It would make it be thought of, not as now, in the light of a possession to be used by the voter for his own interest or pleasure, but as a trust for the public good. It would stamp the exercise of the suffrage as a matter of judgment, not of inclination; as a public function, the right to which is conferred by fitness for the intelligent performance of it.

Nobody will pretend that these effects would be completely produced by so low an educational qualification as reading, writing, and arithmetic; but it would be a considerable step towards them. The very novelty of the requirement—the excitement and discussion which it would produce in the class chiefly affected by it—would be the best sort of education; would make an opening in their minds that would let in light—would set them thinking in a perfectly new manner respecting political rights and responsibilities. (That all should be admitted to the franchise who can fulfil these simple requirements, is not to be expected, nor even desired, unless means were also taken to give to the higher grades of instruction additional or more influential votes. Without such a provision, the educational test adapted for permanency would require to be much more stringent.) What should now be pressed on the consideration of

practical statesmen is, that any lowering of the pecuniary qualification for the purpose of giving the franchise to a greater number of the working classes, should be combined with the further condition of an educational test. It would not be indispensable to disfranchise, on this ground, any electors already registered; but upon all new applicants the test should be imperative. It would be a most substantial improvement in the existing representative system, if all householders, or even all five-pound householders, without distinction of sex—for why should the vote-collector make a distinction where the tax-gatherer makes none? were admitted as electors, on condition of proving to the registering officer that they could read, write, and calculate.

This, then, is one important principle which the expected Reform Bill, without going to any length in innovation which need alarm anybody, may inaugurate. Another principle, only second to this in value, which might also on the present occasion be admitted into the Constitution, is the representation of minorities.

I am inclined to think that the prejudice which undoubtedly exists in the minds of democrats against this principle, arises only from their not having sufficiently considered its mode of operation. It is an eminently democratic principle. The elementary propositions of the democratic creed imply it as an inevitable corollary. Even the government of mere numbers requires that every number should tell in proportion to its amount. What is anti-democratic is, that the minority should be allowed to outweigh the majority; but the principle of universal suffrage

requires that, as far as is consistent with practicality, every minority in the constituency should be represented by a minority in the representative body; and a mode of voting which does not keep this object in view, is contrary to popular government; it does not sum up the opinion of the community correctly. There is no true popular representation if three-fifths of the people return the whole House of Commons, and the remaining two-fifths have no representatives. Not only is this not government by the people, it is not even government by a majority of the people: since the government will be practically in the hands of a majority of the majority. A Parliament may be obtained by universal suffrage, which may represent the opinions of a bare majority of the people; and again, when this Parliament proceeds to legislate, it may pass laws by a bare majority of itself. The governing body, reduced by this double process of elimination, may represent the opinions or wishes of little more than a fourth of the population. If numbers are to be the rule, a third of the people ought not indeed to have two-thirds of the representation, but every third of the people is entitled to a third of the representation; and though there is no possibility of securing this with any degree of precision, it is better to make some approach to it than to ignore minorities altogether.

If the House of Commons were elected by the entire population in a single list, every one would see that the mode of voting would entirely disfranchise the minority. The party which was numerically strongest would rule without opposition, until by its abuse of power, it had provoked a change of public

sentiment; and then the whole party would be turned out at once, and the same unrestrained rule would pass into the hands of its opponents. People do not fear any similar inconvenience in the present case, because they reckon that the party which is in the minority in some places will have the majority in others, and that the local minorities will be virtually represented by the nominees of majorities of their own way of thinking elsewhere. And doubtless this is to a considerable extent the fact; and it generally will be so in the case of those great sections of opinion which pervade all classes, and divide society nearly equally. But it will not be so with others. In France, for example, it is probable that the Protestants do not form the numerical majority of any constituency. If the politics, therefore, of the moment were to turn on any question specially interesting them as Protestants, they would be entirely unrepresented. The class of mere manual labourers would everywhere form a large majority in any electoral district grounded solely on a local division of the country. It might happen, therefore, that every single member of the Legislature would represent the opinions and feelings of manual labourers alone.

To enable minorities to be represented without placing them on an equality with majorities, it would be necessary that every constituency should return at least three members; and I venture to suggest that this is a sufficient number, and that no electoral body ought to return more. When men vote for a long list, they usually adopt entire that which is presented to them by some knot of politicians who assume the

management of elections. They have no personal knowledge or preference in the case of so large a number, and they consequently elect, as a matter of course, whoever are held forth to them as the candidates of their party. (Assuming, then, that each constituency elects three representatives, two modes have been proposed, in either of which a minority, amounting to a third of the constituency, may, by acting in concert, and determining to aim at no more, return one of the members. One plan is that each elector should only be allowed to vote for two, or even for one, although three are to be elected. The other leaves to the elector his three votes, but allows him to give all of them to one candidate. The first of these plans was adopted in the Reform Bill of Lord Aberdeen's Government; but I do not hesitate most decidedly to prefer the second, which has been advocated in an able and conclusive pamphlet by Mr. James Garth Marshall.) The former plan must be always and inevitably unpopular, because it cuts down the privileges of the voter, while the latter, on the contrary, extends them. And I am prepared to maintain that the permission of cumulative votes, that is, of giving either one, two, or three votes to a single candidate, is in itself, even independently of its effect in giving a representation to minorities, the mode of voting which gives the most faithful expression of the wishes of the elector. On the existing plan, an elector who votes for three, can give his vote for the three candidates whom he prefers to their competitors; but among those three he may desire the success of one, immeasurably more than that of the other two, and may be willing to relinquish them entirely

for an increased chance of attaining the greater object. This portion of his wishes he has now no means of expressing by his vote. He may sacrifice two of his votes altogether, but in no case can he give more than a single vote to the object of his preference. Why should the mere fact of preference be alone considered, and no account whatever be taken of the degree of it? The power to give several votes to a single candidate would be eminently favourable to those whose claims to be chosen are derived from personal qualities, and not from their being the mere symbols of an opinion. For if the voter gives his suffrage to a candidate in consideration of pledges, or because the candidate is of the same party with himself, he will not desire the success of that individual more than of any other who will take the same pledges, or belongs to the same party. When he is especially concerned for the election of some one candidate, it is on account of something which personally distinguishes that candidate from others on the same side. Where there is no overruling local influence in favour of an individual, those who would be benefited as candidates by the cumulative vote, would generally be the persons of greatest real or reputed virtue or talents.

In the preceding review of the essentials of a new Parliamentary Reform, no mention has been made of the Ballot. I hope to show sufficient reasons why this should be included, not among the things which ought, but among those which ought not, to form part of a measure for reforming the representation. It appears to me that secret suffrage, a very right and justifiable demand when originally made, would at present, and

still more in time to come, produce far greater evil than good.

The operation of the Ballot is, that it enables the voter to give full effect to his own private preferences, whether selfish or disinterested, under no inducement to defer to the opinions or wishes of others, except as these may influence his own. It follows, and the friends of the ballot have always said, that secrecy is desirable, in cases in which the motives acting on the voter through the will of others are likely to mislead him, while, if left to his own preferences, he would vote as he ought. It equally follows, and is also the doctrine of the friends of the ballot, that when the voter's own preferences are apt to lead him wrong, but the feeling of responsibility to others may keep him right, not secrecy, but publicity, should be the rule.*

* This is the criterion distinctly laid down by a philosopher who did more than any other man of his generation towards making Ballot the creed of Parliamentary Reformers :—

‘There are occasions on which the use of the ballot is advantageous : there are occasions on which it is hurtful. If we look steadily to the end, to which all institutions profess to be directed, we shall not find it very difficult to draw the line of demarcation.

‘A voter may be considered as subject to the operation of two sets of interests : the one, interests arising out of the good or evil for which he is dependent upon the will of other men ; the other, interests in respect to which he cannot be considered as dependent upon any determinate man or men.

‘There are cases in which the interests for which he is not dependent upon other men impel him in the right direction. If not acted on by other interests, he will, in such cases, vote in that direction. If, however, he is acted upon by interests dependent upon other men, interests more powerful than the former, and impelling in the opposite direction, he will vote in the opposite direction. What is necessary

It is for this reason that no one, either Conservative or Reformer, approves of vote by ballot in Parliament itself. A member of Parliament, however secured against misleading influences from without, would often promote his private interest by voting wrong; and the chief security against this violation of his trust, is the publicity of his vote, and the effect on his mind of the opinion which will be formed of his conduct by other people.

Thirty years ago it was still true that in the election of members of Parliament, the main evil to be guarded against was that which the ballot would exclude—coercion by landlords, employers, and customers. At present, I conceive, a much greater source of evil is the selfishness, or the selfish partiali-

therefore, is to save him from the operation of those interests. This is accomplished by enabling him to vote in secret; for, in that case, the man who could otherwise compel his vote, is ignorant in what direction it has been given. In all cases, therefore, in which the independent interests of the voter, those which, in propriety of language, may be called his *own* interests, would dictate the good and useful vote; but in which cases, at the same time, he is liable to be acted upon in the way either of good or of evil, by men whose interests would dictate a base and mischievous vote, the ballot is a great and invaluable security.

‘There is, however, another set of cases, in which those interests of the voter, which have their origin primarily in himself, and not in other men, draw in the hurtful direction, and in which he is not liable to be operated upon by any other interests of other men, than those which each possesses in common with the rest of the community. If allowed, in this set of cases, to vote in secret, he will be sure to vote as the sinister interest impels. If forced to vote in public, he will be subject to all the restraint which the eye of the community, fixed upon his virtue or knavery, is calculated to produce; and, in such cases, the ballot is only an encouragement to evil.’

ties, of the voter himself. A 'base and mischievous vote' is now, I am convinced, much oftener given from the voter's personal interest, or class interest, or some mean feeling in his own mind, than from any fear of consequences at the hands of others: and to these evil influences the ballot would enable him to yield himself up, free from all sense of shame or responsibility.

In times not long gone by, the higher and richer classes were in complete possession of the government. Their power was the master grievance of the country. The habit of voting at the bidding of an employer, or of a landlord, was so firmly established, that hardly anything was capable of shaking it but a strong popular enthusiasm, seldom known to exist but in a good cause. A vote given in opposition to these influences was therefore, in general, an honest, a public-spirited vote: but in any case, and by whatever motive dictated, it was almost sure to be a good vote, for it was a vote against the monster evil—the overruling influence of oligarchy. Could the voter at that time have been enabled, with safety to himself, to exercise his privilege freely, even though neither honestly nor intelligently, it would have been a great gain to reform; for it would have broken the yoke of the then ruling power in the country—the power which had created and which maintained all that was bad in the institutions and the administration of the State—the power of landlords and boroughmongers.

The ballot was not adopted; but the progress of circumstances has done and is doing more and more, in this respect, the work of the ballot. Both the

18 political and the social state of the country, as they affect this question, have greatly changed, and are changing every day. The higher classes are not now masters of the country. A person must be blind to all the signs of the times, who could think that the middle classes are as subservient to the higher, or the working classes as dependent on the higher and middle, as they were a quarter of a century ago. The events of that quarter of a century have not only taught each class to know its own collective strength, but have put the individuals of a lower class in a condition to show a much bolder front to those of a higher. In a majority of cases, the vote of the electors, whether in opposition to or in accordance with the wishes of their superiors, is now not the effect of coercion, which there are no longer the same means of applying, but the expression of their own personal or political partialities. The very vices of the present electoral system are a proof of this. The growth of bribery, so loudly complained of previous to the late Act, and the spread of the contagion to places formerly free from it, are evidence that the local influences are no longer paramount; that the electors now vote to please themselves, and not other people. There is, no doubt, in counties and in the smaller boroughs, a large amount of servile dependence still remaining; but the temper of the times is adverse to it, and the force of events is constantly tending to diminish it. A good tenant can now feel that he is as valuable to his landlord as his landlord is to him; a prosperous tradesman can afford to feel independent of any particular customer. At every election the votes are more and more the voters' own. It is their minds, far more than their personal cir-

cumstances, that now require to be emancipated. They are no longer passive instruments of other men's will—mere organs for putting power into the hands of a controlling oligarchy. The electors themselves are becoming the oligarchy.

Exactly in proportion as the vote of the elector is determined by his own will, and not by that of somebody who is his master, his position is similar to that of a member of Parliament, and publicity is indispensable. So long as any portion of the community are unrepresented, the argument of the Chartists against ballot in conjunction with a restricted suffrage, is unassailable. The present electors, and the bulk of those whom any probable Reform Bill would add to the number, are the middle class; and have as much a class interest, distinct from the working classes, as landlords or great manufacturers. Were the suffrage extended to all skilled labourers, even these would, or might, still have a class interest distinct from the unskilled. Suppose it extended to all men—suppose that what was formerly called by the misapplied name of universal suffrage, and now by the silly and insulting title of manhood suffrage, became the law—the voters would still have a class interest, as distinguished from women. Suppose that there were a question before the Legislature specially affecting women; as whether women should be allowed to graduate at Universities; whether the mild penalties inflicted on ruffians who beat their wives daily almost to death's door, should be exchanged for something more effectual; or suppose that any one should propose in the British Parliament, what one State after another in America is enacting not by a mere law, but by a provision of their revised Consti-

tutions—that married women should have a right to their own property. Are not a man's wife and daughters entitled to know whether he votes for or against a candidate who will support these propositions?

It will of course be objected, that these arguments derive all their weight from the supposition of an unjust state of the suffrage. That if the opinion of the non-electors is likely to make the elector vote more honestly, or more beneficially, than he would vote if left to himself, they are more fit to be electors than he is, and ought to have the franchise. That whoever is fit to influence electors, is fit to be an elector. That those to whom voters ought to be responsible, should be themselves voters; and, being such, should have the safeguard of the ballot, to shield them from the undue influence of powerful individuals or classes to whom they ought *not* to be responsible.

This argument is specious, and I once thought it conclusive. It now appears to me fallacious. All who are fit to influence electors are not, for that reason, fit to be themselves electors. This last is a much greater power than the former, and those may be ripe for the minor political function who could not as yet be safely trusted with the superior. The opinions and wishes of the poorest and rudest class of labourers may be very useful as one influence among others on the minds of the voters, as well as on those of the Legislature; and yet it might be highly mischievous to give them the preponderant influence, by admitting them, in their present state of morals and intelligence, to the full exercise of the suffrage. It is precisely this indirect influence of those who have

not the suffrage over those who have, which, by its progressive growth, softens the transition to every fresh extension of the franchise, and is the means by which, when the time is ripe, the extension is peacefully brought about. But there is also another and a still deeper consideration, which should never be left out of the account in political speculations. The notion is itself unfounded, that publicity, and the sense of being answerable to the public, are of no use unless the public are qualified to form a sound judgment. It is a very superficial view of the utility of public opinion, to suppose that it does good, only when it succeeds in enforcing a servile conformity to itself. To be under the eyes of others—to have to defend oneself to others—is never more important than to those who act in opposition to the opinion of others, for it obliges them to have sure ground of their own. Nothing has so steadying an influence, as working against pressure. Unless when under the temporary sway of passionate excitement, no one will do that which he expects to be greatly blamed for, unless from a preconceived and fixed purpose of his own; which is always evidence of a thoughtful and deliberate character, and, except in radically bad men, generally proceeds from sincere and strong personal convictions. Even the bare fact of having to give an account of their conduct, is a powerful inducement to adhere to conduct of which, at least, some decent account can be given. If any one thinks that the mere obligation of preserving decency is not a very considerable check on the abuse of power, he has never had his attention called to the conduct of those who do not feel under the necessity of observing that

restraint. Publicity is inappreciable, even when it does no more than prevent that which can by no possibility be plausibly defended—than compel deliberation, and force every one to determine, before he acts, what he shall say if called to account for his actions.

But if not now (it may be said), at least hereafter, when all are fit to have votes, and when all men and women are admitted to vote, in virtue of their fitness,—*then* there can no longer be danger of class legislation; then the electors, being the nation, can have no interest apart from the general interest: even if individuals still vote according to private or class inducements, the majority will have no such inducement; and as there will then be no non-electors to whom they ought to be responsible, the effect of the ballot, excluding none but the sinister influences, will be wholly beneficial.

Even in this I do not agree. I cannot think that even if the people were fit for, and had obtained, universal suffrage, the ballot would be desirable. First, because it could not, in such circumstances, be supposed to be needful. Let us only conceive the state of things which the hypothesis implies: a people universally educated, and every grown-up human being possessed of a vote. If even when only a small proportion are electors, and the majority of the population almost uneducated, public opinion is already, as every one now sees that it is, the ruling power in the last resort; it is a chimera to suppose that over a community who all read, and who all have votes, any power could be exercised by landlords and rich people against their own inclination, which it would be at all difficult for

them to throw off. But though the protection of secrecy would then be needless, the control of publicity would be as needful as ever. The universal observation of mankind has been very fallacious, if the mere fact of being one of the community, and not being in a position of pronounced contrariety of interest to the public at large, is enough to ensure the performance of a public duty, without either the stimulus or the restraint derived from the opinion of our fellow-creatures. A man's own particular share of the public interest, even though he may have no private interest drawing him in the opposite direction, is not, as a general rule, found sufficient to make him do his duty to the public without other external inducements. Neither can it be admitted that even if all had votes, they would give their votes as honestly in secret as in public. The proposition that the electors, when they compose the whole of the community, cannot have an interest in voting against the interest of the community, will be found on examination to have more sound than meaning in it. Though the community as a whole can have (as the terms imply) no other interest than its collective interest, any or every individual in it may. A man's interest consists of whatever he takes interest *in*. Everybody has as many different interests as he has feelings; likings or dislikings, either of a selfish or of a better kind. It cannot be said that any of these, taken by itself constitutes 'his interest': he is a good man or a bad, according as he prefers one class of his interests or another. A man who is a tyrant at home will be apt to sympathize with tyranny (when not exercised over himself): he will be almost certain not to sympa-

thize with resistance to tyranny. An envious man will vote against Aristides because he is called the Just. A selfish man will prefer even a trifling individual benefit, above his share of the advantage which his country would derive from a good law; because interests peculiar to himself are those which the habits of his mind both dispose him to dwell on, and make him best able to estimate. A great number of the electors will have two sets of preferences, those on private, and those on public grounds. The last are the only ones which the elector would like to avow. The best side of their character is that which people are anxious to show, even to those who are no better than themselves. People will give dishonest or mean votes from lucre, from malice, from pique, from personal rivalry, from the interests or prejudices of class or sect, far more readily in secret than in public. And cases exist—they may come to be very frequent—in which almost the only restraint upon a majority of knaves, consists in their involuntary respect for the opinion of an honest minority. In such a case as that of the repudiating States of North America, is there not some check to the unprincipled voter in the shame of looking an honest man in the face? Since all this good would be sacrificed by the ballot, even in the circumstances most favourable to it—circumstances not likely to be seen realized by any one now alive—a much stronger case is requisite than can now be made out for its necessity (and the case is continually becoming still weaker), to make its adoption desirable, or even tolerable.

For it must be borne in mind that the ballot can-

not be, and has not been, defended otherwise than as a necessary evil. Necessary it might have been, but an evil it could never fail to be. The moral sentiment of mankind, in all periods of tolerably enlightened morality, has condemned concealment, unless when required by some overpowering motive; and if it be one of the paramount objects of national education to foster courage and public spirit, it is high time now that people should be taught the duty of asserting and acting openly on their opinions. Disguise in all its forms is a badge of slavery. No one will require from slaves the virtues of freemen, nor will scan nicely the means by which slaves effect their emancipation. They begin by resisting covertly; but when the time is come for rebelling openly, a man must have the soul of a slave who prefers the slave's weapon for himself, however his distrust of the courage of others may lead him to sanction its employment. And there is truth in what has always been urged by the enemies of the ballot—that, even supposing it necessary, it could only produce its effect at the price of much lying. The friends of the ballot have indulged a faint hope that it would put an end to canvassing. If it really held out this prospect, the force of the objection to it would be considerably weakened; but such a result is not in the nature of man and of things. As long as human beings exist, the most direct mode of obtaining a person's vote will be to ask him for it. People will solicit a promise, even when they can have no positive assurance that the promise is kept; and a man who thinks that he has power over another, and who is disposed to make a tyrannical use of it, will question him about his vote,

even when he has no guarantee for obtaining a true answer but the man's veracity, or his awkwardness. The voter might, on the plea of public principle, refuse to give any answer; but, unless he was otherwise known to be a man of unusually high principle, the refusal would justly be considered a sufficient proof that a true answer would disclose what it is his interest to conceal. Supporters of the ballot have argued that the voter might resort to those evasive answers which integrity permits in the case of an impertinent question; but an evasive answer to a first question only succeeds when made to an equal, who does not consider himself at liberty to ask a second: and besides, the majority of electors have neither address nor readiness for such evasions; and when they really feel themselves in the power of the questioner, a downright lie, enforced by asseveration if doubted, would be their only resource. Reformers may once have been disposed to wink at this evil, in order to prevent the still greater one of bad government; but it is in itself no small item in the account. It would perhaps be a greater evil in this country than in any other. There are but few points in which the English, as a people, are entitled to the moral pre-eminence with which they are accustomed to compliment themselves at the expense of other nations: but, of these points, perhaps the one of greatest importance is, that the higher classes do not lie, and the lower, though mostly habitual liars, are ashamed of lying. To run any risk of weakening this feeling, a difficult one to create, or, when once gone, to restore, would be a permanent evil too great to be incurred for so very temporary a benefit as the ballot would



confer, even on the most exaggerated estimate of its necessity.

There is a suggestion of another kind, respecting the mode of voting, which has found a favourable reception from some of the supporters and from some of the opponents of the ballot. It is that of collecting the votes of the electors at their own homes, a voting paper being left at the door, like the memorandum of a tax-collector, and filled up by the voter without the trouble of going to the poll. This expedient has been recommended, both on the score of saving expense, and on that of obtaining the votes of many electors who otherwise would not vote, and who are regarded by the advocates of the plan as a particularly desirable class of voters. The scheme has been carried into practice in the election of poor-law guardians, and its success in that instance is appealed to in favour of adopting it in the more important case of voting for a member of the Legislature. But the two cases appear to me to differ in the point on which the benefits of the expedient depend. In a local election for a special kind of administrative business, which consists mainly in the dispensation of a public fund, it is an object to prevent the choice from being exclusively in the hands of those who actively concern themselves about it; for the public interest which attaches to the election being of a limited kind, and in most cases not very great in degree, the disposition to make themselves busy in the matter is apt to be in a great measure confined to persons who hope to turn their activity to their own private advantage; and it may be very desirable to render the intervention of other

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people as little onerous to them as possible, if only for the purpose of swamping these private interests. But when the matter in hand is the great business of national government, in which every one must take an interest who cares for anything out of himself, or who cares even for himself intelligently, it is much rather an object to prevent those from voting who are indifferent to the subject, than to induce them to vote by any other means than that of awakening their dormant minds. The voter who does not care enough about the election to go to the poll, is the very man who, if he can vote without that small trouble, will give his vote to the first person who asks for it, or on the most trifling or frivolous inducement. A man who does not care whether he votes, is not likely to care much which way he votes ; and he who is in that state of mind has no moral right to vote at all ; since if he does so, a vote which is not the expression of a conviction, counts for as much, and goes as far in determining the result, as one which perhaps represents the thoughts and purposes of a life. These reasons appear to me decisive against the change proposed, and in favour of the present plan of delivering the vote at a public polling-place : but the places of voting should be sufficiently numerous and convenient to enable the poorest elector to vote without losing his day's wages ; and, as already intimated, the expense of the poll should not be a charge upon the candidates, but upon the county or borough, or upon the State.

THE END.

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